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PARIS FOR WALLER, LONDON FOR TSOU

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SUBJECT: SYRIA'S INTERIOR MINISTRY WRAPS UP INVESTIGATION OF ATTACK

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael H. Corbin for reasons 1.4 b/d

¶1. (C) Summary: An Interior Ministry official announced October 5 to the official media that it had concluded its investigation into the September 12 attack on the U.S. Embassy in Damascus. The impetus for the attack was U.S. policies in the region, according to the Ministry official. Two suspects remain in custody and will be brought to justice, according to the official press. As of October 10, the Ministry had yet to share the investigation's findings with the Embassy and no charges have been publicly filed against the suspects. In an October 9 meeting on Embassy security, the chief of Damascus Police Services told the RSO that he could not share the investigation with the Embassy and that we should go through the MFA. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) An Interior Ministry official announced October 5 to the official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) that it had concluded its investigation into the September 12 attack on the U.S. Embassy in Damascus. Four Syrians from the Damascus suburb of Al-Tal carried out the attack, according to SANA, which named the assailants as brothers Abdul-Raouf Saleh and Bilal Saleh, another relative Samir Abdul-Ghani Saleh, and Ramzi Atef Shalabi. Abdul-Raouf started planning the operation with his brother in 2004 while both were working in Saudi Arabia and taking religious lessons from a Saudi scholar, according to SANA. Abdul-Raouf sent money to other relatives in Syria, brothers Taher and Anas Saleh, who arranged during the summer of 2006 for Lebanese smugglers to transport weapons and explosives into Syria, SANA reported. On July 20, Abdul-Raouf came to Syria to assemble the bombs, SANA reported. The attackers planned to storm the embassy and kill those inside, the report stated.

¶3. (SBU) The assailants planned to distribute a tape after the attack to media outlets under the name of Abu-Musa'ab al-Zarquawi Brigade," despite the lack of any links to al-Qaeda or any other foreign extremist organizations, SANA reported. The assailants chose the name to link their act to terrorism that "resulted from the U.S. anti-Arab and Muslim policy," according to SANA. The Ministry official added that, "Their extremism has been increased by the political conditions, which affect the region and the U.S. unlimited support to Israel against Arab and Muslims, particularly in Palestine and south Lebanon, the matter that facilitated to convince the others to become involved in extremist acts."

¶4. (SBU) All four assailants were killed as a result of the attack, in addition to security officer Nawfal Khalil and citizen Ahmad Breikhan, SANA reported. Ten Arab and Syrian

citizens were wounded, according to media reports. Taher and Anas Saleh were arrested after the attack and will be brought to justice, according to the Ministry source. (There have been no charges publicly filed against the Saleh brothers as of this week.)

¶ 15. (C) As of October 10, the Ministry has yet to share the investigation's findings with the Embassy. On October 9, RSO met with the chief of Damascus Police Services Maj. Gen. Mutafa Sukari to continue informal cooperation on Embassy security measures (septel). Sukari discussed security enhancements for the Embassy, but said that he was not authorized to share the official investigation and that an official request should go through the MFA. (Note: Embassy has officially requested the MFA to obtain full SARG cooperation on the investigation.)

¶ 16. (C) Comment: We will continue to press for full access to the investigative report. The Interior Ministry statement continues the SARG line of blaming the attack on U.S. policies in the region, but it adds indirect criticism of U.S. ally and current Syrian critic Saudi Arabia. We also take note of the specific reference to weapons smuggling from Lebanon into Syria, at a time when Syria is under intense scrutiny for possible arms smuggling to Lebanon's Hizballah. These connections suggest that, no matter who planned and carried out the September attack, the SARG is seizing, as it has with similar events in the past, this opportunity to both sharply criticize its enemies and to underscore once again Syria's belief that it has a fundamental role in regional stability.

CORBIN